



## HONORABLE PATRICIA W. GRIFFIN

The Administrative Office of the Courts seeks to support a fair and independent judiciary by providing the highest level of administrative support to the Delaware courts in a wide variety of areas. To this end, during the past year, the AOC has focused on a number of new initiatives. One such initiative has been the coordination of continuity of operations and emergency planning. Events occurring in other jurisdictions in the recent past have highlighted the need to have plans in place for a variety of situations including natural disasters, as well as terrorism, fire, and other situations which could severely disrupt the court system's operations. In order to help the court system meet any of these possible contingencies, the AOC has been working with the courts, Facilities Management, the Department of Technology and Information and other agencies in the Executive Branch, to develop priorities and plans for continuing and/or resuming operations following a disaster situa-

tion. In addition, the AOC has worked with the courts to develop draft legislation clarifying the authority of the Chief Justice to take extraordinary measures to ensure the operations of the courts and the delivery of justice in emergency situations. An additional facet of emergency planning addressed by the AOC this year was the completion of the fire safety plan for the New Castle County Courthouse.

Another focus of the AOC this past year has been the staff training program. The program is being reinvigorated with new training planned in a variety of areas in which needs were identified by judicial officers, court administrators and staff, and the development of a website compiling information of all state-sponsored training opportunities. One new training initiative was a session on advanced Westlaw techniques and an introduction to the court system's law libraries for new law clerks. Other areas of emphasis

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have been first aid and training of court security personnel and other court staff in the use of the defibrillators that are located in courthouses throughout the state, as well as exploring the use of distance learning for courses in judicial administration.

The court interpreter program made great strides during Fiscal Year 2007 with the filling of the new program coordinator position. Rules for the Court Interpreter Program, as well as a continuing education policy, were developed and approved. An emphasis on recruitment has led to an increase in the number of persons attending the orientation program and being certified as court interpreters. Also, a pilot telephone program policy has been developed to help ensure that certified interpreters will be available in situations when it would otherwise be difficult to obtain one.

Another area to which the AOC has devoted significant efforts over the past year has been planning for the National Mock Trial Championships which will be held in Wilmington in May 2008 and in which 44 high school teams from throughout the country will participate. Working as part of a committee which includes members of the judiciary, the bar, and others, the AOC has been focusing on the numerous logistics such as providing accommodations, planning events, and providing court security necessary to make this national event a success.

A recent highlight in AOC services was the revised career ladder process developed by AOC Human Resource Management, which reduced the average time between a person's eligibility for promotion under the career ladder to the date of

decision from 333 days (under the old process) to 186 days, and the average processing time from receipt of the career ladder request to decision from 37.8 days to 1.7 days, or by more than 95%.

The AOC supported the work of the self-help center in the New Castle County Courthouse and the *pro bono* legal assistance program, which offered limited legal assistance through volunteer attorneys. In addition, the AOC worked with the Justice of the Peace Court and others to develop an initiative providing information to landlords and tenants through seminars held at various locations in New Castle County. Work was also undertaken to assist the Court of Chancery in developing interactive accounting forms for guardianships.

During the past year, the AOC provided staff assistance to judicial committees and programs, and assisted in policy development. In particular, assistance was provided this year in addressing retention and recruitment issues relating to the conflict counsel program, supporting the on-going legislative initiative, and developing policies relating to access to information and authorized computer usage. Staff support was also provided to the law library committee in conducting a survey of law library users in Kent and New Castle Counties and preparing a report to the Chief Justice. In addition, the AOC provided on-going staff assistance to the Operations Security Committee and the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee with emphasis during the past year on developing security policies such as centralized parcel delivery, and after-hours access to the New Castle County Courthouse for title abstractors. The AOC also provided many hours of admin-

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istrative support to the judicial branch agencies, particularly related to fiscal, personnel and technology matters.

The COTS case management initiative continued to be the major focus of the AOC's Judicial Information Center. Work continued on supporting and maintaining current technology, as well as on new projects, such as the development or redesign of the courts' and judicial branch agencies' internet and intranet web sites, including Family Court, Child Placement Review Board, the law libraries, Violent Crimes Compensation Board and the new AOC intranet site; efforts supporting statistical reporting for the Judiciary's Annual Report; and projects related to the partnership with the Government Information Center of the Delaware Department of State.

In furtherance of its broader approach, the AOC participated for the first time in the Partners for Progress initiative, along with Delaware state agencies; organized a conference on public access to court records for the Mid-Atlantic Region Conference of State Court Administrators, which included representatives from Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Delaware; prepared a COSCA "white paper" entitled "Court Interpretation: Fundamental to Access to Justice"; and served on a panel briefing Congressional staff on court interpreter issues.

Finally, the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement (OSCCE) began a review of its collections methods and anticipates developing new initiatives to expedite and increase collections.

### **FY 2007 AOC Statistical Snapshot: HOW MANY?**

#### ***Dollars OSCCE collected in amounts due to courts and agencies?***

\$3.58 million

#### ***Visitors obtained information from the New Castle County Courthouse (NCCCH) Information/Front Desk?***

204,408 visitors

#### ***Persons received assistance in the NCCCH Self-Help Center and also through the limited pro bono legal assistance program?***

16,295 persons received assistance in the Self-Help Center  
239 persons received help through the limited *pro bono* legal assistance program

#### ***Hours of interpreter services were provided for court proceedings?***

Approximately 5,760 hours

#### ***Requests to address problems did the JIC Helpdesk receive and address?***

8,289 requests

#### ***Employment applications were processed and qualified, career ladder and advanced salary requests analyzed, and orientations conducted by AOC's HRM?***

1,616 employment applications  
34 career ladder  
21 advanced salary requests  
39 employee orientations

## AUTHORIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE AOC

The Administrative Office of the Courts was established in 1971 pursuant to 10 *Del.C.* § 128. The function of the office is to assist the Chief Justice in carrying out the responsibilities as administrative head of the Delaware courts.

The AOC provides a wide variety of support services to the courts ranging from assisting in policy development to technology assistance to providing day-to-day support services. Among its ongoing services are:

- **Preparation of the Judicial Branch Budget in conjunction with the individual courts and agencies and coordination with the Budget Office**
- **Support services for the New Castle County Courthouse including operating the information desk, the filing and payments center and the mailroom**
- **Coordination services relating to the New Castle County Court house including staffing the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee and the Security Operations Committee, as well as coordinating with Facilities Management and Capitol Police**
- **Judicial Education and staff training**
- **Court Interpreter coordination to provide interpreters in various languages as well as for hearing impaired persons**
- **Self-represented litigant assistance including operating the New Castle County Courthouse Pro Se Center, the *pro bono* legal assistance program, and related assistance**
- **Public Information including preparation of the Annual Report of the Judiciary, the Delaware Docket Newsletter, and press releases**
- **Research and Statistics including compilation and analysis of data for the Annual Report**
- **Staff support to various Judicial Branch Committees**
- **Legislative Coordination as part of the Judicial Branch's Legislative Team**
- **Personnel and accounting support for the Supreme Court, Arms of the Court, and Judicial Branch Agencies**
- **Coordination of technology-related projects including the COTS integrated case management program**
- **Operation of Helpdesk for technology problems experienced by court users**
- **Website assistance for developing and maintaining websites**
- **Business analysis, program development, and data integration/administration for technology-related initiatives**
- **Statewide collections of certain court-ordered financial assessments.**